

Professor Siro Kitamura (1906-2002)

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Professor Siro Kitamura passed away on March 21, 2002, at the age of 95. He led the life of true botanist throughout his career of nearly a full century, making great contributions to the systematics of the Compositae, the flora of Asia, especially of the Sino-Japanese Floristic Region, and to many other fields of plant taxonomy and plant geography.

Professor Kitamura as a botanist

Professor Kitamura was born on September 22, 1906, in Ohtsu, central Japan. When he graduated from the Faculty of Science, Kyoto University, in 1931, he published his first scientific paper, *Nova Circiae Asiae Orientalis*, which was a booklet of 23 pages issued by himself. In the Graduate School of Kyoto University, he worked on the Compositae under the supervision of Professor Genichi Koidzumi. Since his second paper, *Compositae Japonicae 1*, was also published in the form of a small pamphlet, also issued by himself, he wished to have a journal to which he could submit his papers, even though his family was wealthy enough to financially support his privately published booklets.

At that time, the *Botanical Magazine*, Tokyo, was the official issue of the Botanical Society of Japan, and the *Journal of Japanese Botany* was issued from the Tsumura Laboratory under the editorship of Tomitaro Makino, also in Tokyo. Botanists in Kyoto always suspected that papers submitted by their colleagues in the Tokyo area were given preferential treatment and published first. In 1932, Professor

Koidzumi founded a new journal, *Acta Phytotaxonomica et Geobotanica*, and Professor Kitamura (a graduate student at the time) joined the journal along with his young colleagues, Jisaburo Ohwi, Motozi Tagawa, Yuichi Yoneda and others, at Kyoto University. His *Compositae Japonicae* and most of his other papers in his early days were either published in this journal or in the *Memoirs of the College of Science*, Kyoto University.

Professor Kitamura undertook a variety of field studies within and outside Japan. He suffered from poor health since childhood and was at first interested in cultivating herbals when he was about 14 years old. His interest in horticulture increased with age and his interest in cultivation extended to wild plants, which evolved into his collection of herbarium specimens of the local flora when he was in junior high school. Based on these collections of wild plants in cultivation and in specimens, he started collecting books on plant taxonomy and floristics. His library developed into a significant collection of literature, most of which was donated to the Herbarium of Kyoto University in late 2000. Although his poor health prevented him from collecting actively during his high school years, Professor Kitamura started collecting plants in earnest in various parts of Japan when he became a student at Kyoto University. In 1930 he made trips to Hachijo Island for one month, to Korea and northeast China for two months, and to Hokkaido and Sakhalin for one month, in addition to trips to various parts of Honshu, Shikoku, and

Kyushu. His first trip to Taiwan was in 1932. He spent about three months studying specimens in the herbarium and undertaking field trips.

The first contributions of Professor Kitamura were on the Japanese species of Compositae. His thesis, *Compositae Japonicae*, was completed in six

parts and published in the *Memoirs of the College of Science, Kyoto Imperial University, Series B, Biology*, and its successor, *Memoirs of the College of Science, University of Kyoto, Series B, Biology*, between 1937 and 1957. At the time of his graduate work Japan covered a wider geographical area, and his careful



Prof. Dr. Siro Kitamura (1906-2002) on 1973.

observation of herbarium specimens along with observations of the plants in the field and in cultivation throughout the entire area makes his paper a very reliable reference for a large portion of eastern Asia. He continued his interest in the Compositae throughout his career, and later he studied species not only in Japan, but throughout Asia in general. It is remarkable that his last scientific paper was the final and sixth part of his Studies in Asian Compositae contributed to *Acta Phytotaxonomica et Geobotanica* in 1991.

During the time of the 2nd World War, and for several years thereafter, the atmosphere in Japan was not conducive to scientific research in the universities, but Professor Kitamura continued his botanical contributions during such difficult times. Simultaneously, his interest in cultivated plants grew rather rapidly. He spent his high school days not in natural science courses but in the humanities, and his interest in literature and humanities formed the broad basis of his ideas on the relationship between plants and human culture. He contributed in group research with some professors in the humanities, and he contributed several papers in Japanese on the history and philosophy of science.

Professor Kitamura went to Shikoku in 1949 for field work because of the peculiar serpentine flora there. Since then, his interest in speciation in particular edaphic situations developed, and he undertook a variety of research projects on serpentine floras. His interest in speciation in particular edaphic conditions was developed further by his student, Professor Tatemi Shimizu, who studied the limestone floras in Japan.

In 1953, Kyoto University sent a large scientific expedition to explore the Himalaya-Hindukush regions under the leadership of Professor Hitoshi Kihara. Professor Kitamura was the head of the botany team and explored in Afghanistan, especially in Nuristan in northeast Afghanistan. With rich collections from this botanically less known area, he undertook an intensive study of Afghan plants that yielded his excellent *Flora of Afghanistan*, published in 1960. Through this comprehensive work, he showed that the Himalayan

corridor extends to Nuristan. His observations resulted in the first revision of Hooker's account of the biogeography of the Himalayan areas.

The botanical interests of Professor Kitamura grew from a Japan-centered perspective to one that included the entire Sino-Japanese floristic region in general, and from *Cirsium* (Compositae), to all seed plants. Eventually he worked on the Compositae of Southeast Asia based on the collections made by Japanese botanists after the 1960s.

As Professor Kitamura worked in very wide area of botany, it is rather difficult to summarize his contributions within a few pages, and we understand that his botanical contributions were further extended through the activities of his students and even by their successors.

University experiences

Professor Kitamura loved science very much, and especially botany. He was always very happy when he was surrounded by the diversity of plants.

Professor Kitamura spent his botanical career completely in Kyoto University. He was appointed a Research Assistant at Kyoto University in 1938, and spent his professional career in Kyoto University until he retired from there in 1970. He was promoted rapidly within the University, to Research Associate in 1939, Associate Professor in 1943, and finally to Professor of Botany in 1945. He spent a quarter of a century as the head of Laboratory of Plant Taxonomy and Phytogeography in Kyoto University. Although he presided over the laboratory for a quarter of a century, he himself often apologized that he was not a good scientific administrator, compared with his success in the field of botany.

He always suffered from administrative duties in the University, but was highly successful in developing the laboratory of plant taxonomy and phytogeography, actually training many of the leading taxonomists in Japan. Still, he always complained that he was not very happy in administration. He helped

Professor Koidzumi in founding *Acta Phytotaxonomica et Geobotanica*, and developed it into an internationally recognized journal, now in its 53rd volume. It has been the official journal of the Japanese Society for Plant Systematics since 2001 when the Japan Society of Plant Taxonomists and the Phytogeographical Society were united. Professor Kitamura also supported Professor Koidzumi in founding the Herbarium of Kyoto University (KYO). The Herbarium, with more than 1,300,000 specimens, including many valuable type specimens described by Professor Kitamura, is now a section of the University Museum of Kyoto University. The library of Kyoto University contains an excellent collection of botanical literature, including the personal collections of Professor Kitamura, who donated it to the library before he passed away. In establishing such an advanced botanical institute, Professor Kitamura contributed very much. His administrative success far exceeded his own humble evaluation of himself.

Just before the serious upheavals in Japanese universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Professor Kitamura was elected a Senator of Kyoto University in 1968. That position is usually understood to be equivalent to vice dean of the faculty. His new position led to direct involvement in the confusion in the Japanese universities raised by the radical students during 1969-1970, just before he retired from the University in 1970. Radical students occupied several buildings at Kyoto University at the beginning of 1969. Professor Kitamura exhibited great bravery at the time. He was determined, by himself, to protect the herbarium from attack by the students gone wild.

His attitude was consistent in keeping the research facility safe, but this idea was not universally accepted at the time of such confusion in the universities. His true nature as a scientist was incidentally revealed and his dedication and determination during such an abnormal situation was acknowledged by the faculty and staff. He stood out as a pure scientist even while the universities were under siege, and



Professor Kitamura at Shi-shan mountain, Kunming, China, in 1988. He had wished to visit Yunnan to see the center of plant biodiversity in Sino-Japanese Floristic Region and actually visited there at his age of 82, and it was his last trip abroad.

he was respected for his dedication and commitment. His exemplary behavior was further evidence of his success as an administrator in the University.

Professor Kitamura usually worked hard at botany during the summer holidays, as he was quite free from his administrative duties in the University at that time. He enjoyed botany so much, and those were his happiest days. In his later years at the university he had trouble with his eyes after a day of heavy work in the herbarium. Still, he continued to examine specimens to fulfil his deep scientific curiosity.

Social education

When he helped found the Phytogeographical Society,

Professor Kitamura had a particular idea to issue the *Acta Phytotaxonomica et Geobotanica* without any support from the government. He expected to receive voluntary support from professional and non-professional botanists, and he proposed that a few Japanese articles be included in each issue to attract the support of non-professional botanists. He often joined nature observing eco-tours as a teacher of botany, and he succeeded in attracting a number of non-professional plant lovers to join the Phytogeographical Society. (I myself met Professor Kitamura for the first time when I was still a high school student. He had joined a plant observation tour arranged by a local biological society near my home town.)

Professor Kitamura's Coloured Illustration of Japanese Herbs, and of Japanese Trees, five volumes in all, were best sellers of this kind of book from the 1950s through the 1970s. Even now they are popular books for plant lovers in Japan. Through these popular books, non-professional plant lovers in Japan have been able to learn much more about the scientific features of plants. We can say that the scientific level of naturalists in Japan is higher even than in most developed countries, and these popular books contributed to their attainment of such a high level of knowledge.

Professor Kitamura published a number of articles on plants in Japanese, especially in the early volumes of *Acta Phytotaxonomica et Geobotanica*. Those papers raised interest in plant taxonomy among non-professional naturalists in Japan, and many plant hunters developed into non-professional botanists through the lessons they learned by reading his earlier papers in Japanese. He contributed such popular books and articles partly in response to being invited to do so by the readers of the journal and partly by his interest in social education. He evaluated a series of works of Yokusai Iinuma published at the end of the Yedo dynasty, and published the complete work of Yokusai Iinuma as *Illustrations of Herbals*. In this contribution, he owed in various ways his experiences in issuing the Coloured Illustrations of Japanese

Plants.

In his later years, Professor Kitamura published collections of his valuable papers, including additional articles in Japanese. The *Collected Works of Siro Kitamura* consisted of five volumes, issued between 1982 and 1993. He included a brief autobiography and a list of all his scientific papers, which is a valuable reference, in the 4th volume of the series.

Honors

Professor Kitamura was awarded the First Matsushita Konosuke Prize in 19x in commemoration of his long term contributions to research in Greenery and Flowers. He was also awarded a medal of the 3rd Class upon reaching his 70th year of birth from the Japanese government.

The late Emperor Showa loved biology, and in his later ages he invited a group of botanists every year to the Imperial Summer Resort in Nasu. Professor Kitamura was one of the permanent members of this group, and every year he went to Nasu at the end of his summer vacation. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to listen to him reminisce on his experiences during the days he spent at Nasu.

His days at home

Professor Kitamura often remembered the benefits he received from his elder brother, who helped him after his parents passed away. He grew up comfortably with full financial support from his family, and he could concentrate his days on his botanical interest.

He married Michi Nakamura in 1936, and they lived in the same house near Kyoto University until he passed away in 2002. He had a very happy family and was the father of three sons and two daughters. He loved all of his children, but he lost one son while he was still active. The death of that son was a great loss to him in his later age, and a lasting shocked. His eldest son is a chemist and is Professor of Chemistry at Ehime University; one of his daughters is an agri-

cultural chemist and is now Professor Emeritus, Nagoya University. No children followed their great father in botany.

In memory of their younger days, Mrs. Kitamura frequently told us that Professor Kitamura often vanished from home for many days, then came back from his field work rather suddenly without notice.

From the impressions of the young wife, we can now understand that botanists at that time worked passionately in the field, often forgetting their families. Still, we know that Professor Kitamura loved his family throughout his life, and always thanked Mrs. Kitamura for her help.